

Concept of "Qi" or "Ki" in Japanese Qigong Research

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Abstract: Japanese qigong research became active during the 1990's. In ancient Chinese, qigong was called *dao-yin*. In the beginning, the techniques of qigong were simpler and trainees merely stopped their breath during exercise. Presently, qigong is viewed as a kind of exercise for the health of the mind and body. "Qi" or "ki" is an important concept of qigong research and originates from ancient Chinese thought. The original meaning of the word is "movement of a cloud". In Japanese today, the word of qi/ki is ordinarily used as an expression of weather change, an activity of the body and soul, a natural phenomenon, etc. Ki as an ordinary word is often used for something intangible like ESP when it has paranormal meaning. Today, traditional Oriental medicine like acupuncture is accepted popularly in Japan as a kind of complementary and alternative medicine. In Oriental medicine, qi/ki is used on balance as a practical concept. It is not so important to discuss whether ki/qi has substance or not in a typical clinical environment. On the other, qi/ki in qigong is used as if it has physical substance. The concept of qigong was defined in China in the 1950's. Qigong is a generic term for various health methods and skills of martial arts, Buddhism, etc., therefore the number of kinds of qigong is huge and it is easy to establish a new qigong method. In the early 20th century, Reijutsu movement occurred in Japan. One of aims of Reijutsu is to restore health. Reijutsu uses various healing methods including laying-on-of-hands, direct hand touch and healing by religious rituals. Reijutsu practitioners visited Mongolia in China and lectured their techniques to Chinese. A qigong performance of emitting external qi is considered to be developed relatively recently and have influences of Mesmerism and Reijutsu. In modern Japanese studies, there is a consideration that the major effects of external qi can be explained by well-known psychological phenomena, e.g. suggestion. This is the most cautious scenario, and skeptics and many scientists outside of qigong research like it. In contract, there are more than several dozen researchers who assume the existence of physical substances of external qi and they have tried to measure some effects using various sensors of infrared rays, magnetic fields, etc. But, detections by sensors were rarely observed, and moreover the powers of detected signals were too small to cause events directly. On the other hand, there were reports on a "residual" property of external qi which suggests the existence of a substance. Therefore, they think that the concept of external qi is not so simple. In fact details of the concept of qi or external qi are still obscure. And the concept does not apply to all parapsychological phenomena, moreover, there is a difference of training methods between qigong and psi. But, it is very useful to study limited problems at present day.

Keywords: Japan, qi, ki, qigong, external qi, waiqi, Reijutsu, psi, concept

Introduction

In Japan, the transition of the concept of subtle energy has not been well studied in philology yet. Here, the author treats the concept of "qi" (in Chinese) or "ki" (in Japanese) in qigong research which has become active during the 1990's.

Ge, ancient Chinese philosopher [AD 283-343], noted qigong. In his book, qigong was called *dao-yin*. In the beginning, the techniques of qigong were simpler and trainees merely stopped their breath during exercise. Presently, qigong is viewed as a kind of exercise for the health of the mind and body. Qigong puts emphasis on the control of the posture, breath and mind-states. In the usual method of qigong training, a trainee tries to imagine the flow of qi throughout his or her body, and to control it. Imagined qi is often called internal qi when it is circulated in the body and it is called external qi (or *waiqi*) when elicited outside the body. It is said that psi ability is sometimes induced when the zen, yoga or meditation are practiced and psi ability is occasionally seen in qigong. The concept of qi/ki is similar to that of psi although they are not the same.

The author has written two articles detailing recent Japanese studies on anomalous phenomena (Kokubo, 1998; Kokubo & Kasahara 2000). The focal point of this brief paper is what Japanese qigong researchers think about qi and its background. It is my hope that the present paper, together with the previously mentioned two papers, will complement each other and contribute to the development of Japanese and international parapsychology.

General Concept of Qi or Ki

According to Satou (1996), originally Chinese character qi meant "movement of a cloud", or more generally, "change of weather". Weather was divided roughly into clear weather and cloudy, where were called *yang-qi* and *yin-qi*. This became the basic concept of positive and negative thought in ancient China. The word qi was used not only for the weather as a natural phenomenon, but also for the change of climate. In addition, qi was used for humans, to describe body activities, such as the expiration and inhalation, and mental or emotional activities such as courage and vitality. Many Japanese still use the word ki today with its ancient meanings. Qi/ki cannot be limited to specific activities of the body and soul, rather they show life activity. Moreover, the words are used to describe natural phenomena of electricity *den-ki* and magnetism *ji-ki*, etc.

In ancient Chinese philosophy, qi existed here and there throughout the whole world and persons could control it when they were in good condition. Presently, some qigong masters may make similar claims to the general public. They may claim that they can make a cloud appear or disappear. Such amazing demonstrations can impress certain people regarding the existence of qi or the truth of paranormal episodes in ancient literatures.

In modern day Japan, ki has both normal meanings and paranormal meanings. Examples of the former are *ki-bun* (feeling), *ten-ki* (weather), *kuu-ki* (air), *ki ga kuruu* (become crazy), etc. In uses with some

paranormal meanings, a person says I feel *ja-ki* (wicked atmosphere) when an evil spirit seem to be hiding nearby or I feel *sa-kki* (an impulse to kill) when he/her feels someone in attempting to kill him/her. On the one hand, the word *ki* is used for something intangible like ESP, on the other, *qi/ki* in *qigong* is used as if it has physical substance. In Japanese animation movies, there are many scenes in which a hero emits *tou-ki* (fighting spirit) from his body, but such a popular image of "ki" is considered to have appeared relatively recently. In the early 1900's, for example, the era when Fukurai [1869-1952] was active, the word *nen* (thought) was used more often than "ki" in a paranormal context. Fukurai was a pioneer of modern parapsychological research in Japan and studied clairvoyance and thoughtography. In 1910, he used a non-developed glass plate of photography on which three Chinese characters were shot as a target, and discovered anomalous exposure on it after successful clairvoyance. He considered that exposure was caused by mental activities during clairvoyance, and named it *nen-sha* (thoughtography). *Toh-ate*, which Yamamoto et al. (1996a, 1996b) studies, is a skill of the traditional Japanese martial arts. *Toh-ate* is the skill to attack a human or small animals in another place by "ki". *Toh-ate* is considered to have been existing at least for several decades. However, it is difficult to go back to seek a clear origin, because martial artists do not have a tendency to describe their secrets in the literature and there is even the possibility that *Toh-ate* originates modern entertainment stories.

The word *qi* is an important term in traditional Oriental medicine like acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, and *Kanpou* which is a Japanized form of Chinese medicine, etc. Oriental medicine originated in ancient China, and Japanese therapists studied and developed it gradually over a long time. In the 19th century, the Japanese Government treated Oriental medicine coldly as unscientific after modern Western medicine was established in Japan. However, many therapists made efforts to restore Oriental medicine and the Government established a system of official licenses of practitioners of acupuncture and moxibustion. Today, Oriental medicine is accepted popularly in Japan as a kind of complementary and alternative medicine. *Ki/qi* in Oriental medicine is assumed to be a kind of vital energy which flows along meridians in the body. Therapists recover the balance of the living body by stimulating peculiar points on the body by acupuncture, or using moxa cautery and the finger-pressure, etc. and cure sickness. However, many modern therapists tend to view the concept of this "energy" as a practicable thought when they make a treatment plan. In a typical clinical environment, it is not so important to discuss whether *ki/qi* has substance or not. Therapists consider more practical matters, for example, importance of changing a treatment to match an individual patient's constitution; extraction of important component from traditional drugs; the physiological mechanism of the meridian system.

Certainly, the ordinary concept of *qi/ki* in Japan in the early 21st century includes a new component, a physical substance, which denotes a subtle energy or power.

Qigong and Reijutsu Movements

In China in the 1950's, the concept of *qigong* was defined. Introduction of a modern medical system

in China was later than in other countries. The Chinese Government recommended prophylaxis to promote health and self-recovery by improving natural immunity. The Government promoted a qigong movement and build qigong hospitals countrywide. The major part of qigong research was done from the viewpoint of the health sciences; external qi was also studied a little. External qi was claimed to be imagined-qi flowing from the body. External qi was studied after the Cultural Revolution [1966-1976].

It is said popularly that there are more than one thousand kinds of qigong. However, qigong is a generic term for various health methods and skills of martial arts, Buddhism, etc., therefore the hugeness of kinds of qigong is a logical result. Moreover, it is easy to establish a new qigong method. Qigong can be divided into a few classes from the viewpoints of whether the posture is static or not; differences of traditions and descents, etc. In Japan, qigong is often classified into internal qigong and external qigong from the viewpoint of whether qigong practitioners do not try or try to emit qi outside of the body. This classification is used only in Japan, because it is speculated that many Japanese were impressed with scientific measurements of infrared rays and bio-photons emitted from qigong masters in a TV program in 1988. Although Japanese skeptics discuss the existence of qigong on occasion, this means that they have their doubts on the reality of external qi and its PK-like effects, not on the usefulness of qigong exercise to health.

Japanese scientific studies on qigong began in the late 1980's. In Japan, as in China, qigong research focused on health science (in which internal qi is studied chiefly) with some explorative research on anomalous effects (in which external qi is treated). Qigong as a kind of health science is acceptable socially, consequently many researchers study qigong only from this viewpoint. When qigong was first introduced into Japan, qigong research was looked upon as being the same as psi research because anomalous effects by external qi were emphasized. In spite of the decrease of such misunderstanding recently, there are still some reports in which qigong and psi are substantially confused, if anything, purposely. In this cases, three possible factors may be involved, as follows (Kokubo & Kasahara, 2000).

1. Definition of qigong masters. In order to gain public acceptance, experimenters often purposefully designate psychics as qigong masters in their publications, and some psychics habitually call themselves qigong masters.
2. Influence from Chinese thought towards somatic science. Chinese somatic science assumes that qi has a basis in common with psi, and that qigong and psi are essentially inseparable from each other because both exist along the same spectrum of qi.
3. Extension of the territories of orthodox science. The frontiers of orthodox science have been duly extended to include these paranormal phenomena.

In the early 20th century in Japan, a boom in Reijutsu occurred throughout the country. Then, practitioners of Reijutsu extended their working regions overseas; for example, they lectured on Reijutsu in Mongolia in 1911 (Imura, 1984) and instructed persons from Western countries after they were repressed

with in Japan by the Japanese Government (Shimidzu, 1996). One of aims of Reijutsu is to restore health. Reijutsu uses various healing methods including laying-on-of-hands, direct hand touch and healing by religious rituals. At its peak in populating, Reijutsu was practiced with various types of explanations, i.e., that healing was the result of some power, invisible rays similar to X rays, or the workings of spiritual entities. At present, there are several active organizations who keep and practice Reijutsu therapies in Japan. Moreover, some sects of Reijutsu, e.g. Reiki, have been reactivated in modernized style by reimportation from overseas countries where the original laying-on-of-hands technique has been simplified or modified. Japanese scholarship has taken no notice of the Reijutsu movement for a long time, therefore the details of the origin of its techniques and the process of organization are still obscure. Historians consider that Reijutsu was influenced by Kurosumi-kyou, established in the 19th century, as a sect of Shintoism (Shimidzu, 1996). Although the history of the qi philosophy in China is very long, it is considered that Chinese qigong masters began to perform emissions of external qi in relatively recent days as a part of qigong therapy. Their styles or manners of emitting external qi are considered to be composed in the 20th century with influences of techniques and thoughts of Reijutsu and Mesmerism. In this historical context, external qi as a subtle energy, which present-day researchers have an interest in, can be said to be a complex combination of ancient and modern thoughts.

Concept of External Qi in Qigong Research

The current Japanese community of researchers does not have a consensus on the concept of qi, especially external qi yet. When a workshop on external qi was held in Beijing in China in 1998, Chinese researchers on qigong and somatic science debated the existence of external qi with some skeptics and a few Japanese researchers. No consensus of the existence was reached at the workshop, but it was recognized that further studies were needed. On the other hand, there have been few such academic meetings in Japan, and there has been no investigation on the thoughts or attitudes of Japanese qigong researchers. Therefore, only the following empirical considerations are possible.

First, there is a consideration that the major effects of external qi can be explained by well-known psychological phenomena, e.g. suggestion. This is the most cautious scenario, and skeptics and many scientists outside of qigong research like it. Perhaps, there are also many qigong researchers whose attitudes are based on it. In contract, there are more than several dozen researchers who assume the existence of physical substances of external qi and they have tried to measure some effects using various sensors of infrared rays, magnetic fields, etc., and presented discussions at formal and informal meetings. Possibilities for detecting external qi by highly sensitive sensors were shown by previous Chinese reports in which qi was measured by infrared rays (Gu & Lin, 1978), electric potentials (Gu et al., 1979), magnetic fields (Gu, 1980), and liquid crystals (Liu et al., 1984), although the first report on infrared rays of external qi is considered to include artifacts today. Early studies were done by Chinese qigong masters who visited Japan. Later Japanese subjects also were used because the qigong boom produced many self-appointed qigong masters. At the

beginning, researchers vaguely assumed the existence of the substance of external qi and tried to unmask it. However, they soon realized that this was far from easy. Detections by sensors were rarely observed, and moreover the powers of detected signals were too small to cause physical, chemical or physiological events directly. Therefore, there are some researchers who use other explanations: for example, sonic waves and infrared rays transmit some vital signals from the qigong master's body to the receiver's body so that physiological changes of the receiver are caused (Machi, 1992); and external qi is a complex phenomena consist of physical, psychological and unknown factors. Of course, these ideas are temporary, not rigid hypotheses.

There is a popular view that something invisible qi, ki and/or nen can be charged into materials. Qigong masters and psychics claim frequently that they can charge their power into materials. Although these thoughts and claims may seem worthy of being simply shrugged off as superstitions, there are experimental reports that anomalous effects are caused by a medal or water into which qigong masters (or possibly psychics) charged qi (Kataoka et al. 1997a, 1997b; Takeshige & Aoki, 1994). These studies suggested that samples somehow exhibited particular effects as if they could hold anomalous qi effects within themselves at least for a while. (Grad (1976) reported essentially similar results.) Such a "residual" property of external qi may suggest the existence of a substance.

Table 1 shows examples of recent explorations in Japan. The table includes unsuccessful reports and presentations at the academic conferences.

Table 1 Preliminary Classification of Japanese Research after 1990 on External Qi

Type	Device, method or target
physical sensors	thermograph
	bio-photon
	magnetic fields
	chemical change of samples
	ozone and electric potential
activities of cells or animals	colony formation of cultured human cells
	cancer tissue in mouse
	activity of NK cells
	electric activity of cells of the pineal gland
	activity of mouse behavior
physiological sensors	immunological analysis of peripheral blood
	electrodermal activity
	electroencephalogram
	respiration
	heart pulse

Towards Further Study

In a general sense, research on anomalous effects of external qi can be considered to be a part of research on psi or bio-PK from the viewpoint of difficulty to explain the anomalous properties. However, Japanese qigong researchers, except for a few, do not think of themselves as parapsychologists at present.

The reasons are considered to be that public interest focuses on problems relating to their health, e.g. external qi therapy, and researchers recognize that it is easy to get the backing of public opinion if they study qigong as a kind of health science. In experimental styles, qigong researchers tend to promote their studies as approaching the mechanism directly even those the true properties of external qi have not been explicated well yet. Therefore, their studies often have many flaws in the strict sense of the standard procedure of parapsychology. Of course, it is difficult generally to set double blinded conditions in experiments of laying-on-of-hands. Moreover, there is an important difference between qigong masters and psychics. Strangely enough, perhaps not by chance, good qigong masters are not always the best subjects for parapsychological studies, except for qigong masters who are considered psychics. Japanese researchers also know that Chinese training methods of psi are obviously different from those of qigong. It is said that usual qigong exercises can not develop psi abilities, but only psi-conducive training can do. In the first stage of psi-conducive training at Yunnan and Fudan Universities in China, the trainees repeat merely to do clairvoyance single-mindedly, never using any images of qi (Kokubo & Yamamoto, 1999). When a university in Wuhan, in China, had a course for psychics, qigong was done by students who were considered psychics, but qigong was only considered useful as a control method for psychic abilities.

Chinese somatic science assumes that qigong and psi have the common base of qi, but the concept of qi in qigong is considered to be substantial and materialistic, not so parapsychological. The concept of psi is more applicable to various phenomena than qi, but the concept of psi may be too almighty when researchers attempt to investigate intensively a certain topic resembling anomalous effects of external qi. Although the author can not predict the transition of the concept of external qi, but it is expected to continue to attract Japanese researchers in the years ahead.

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